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ABSTRACT

Traditionally linguists have considered pidgin languages as corrupted constructions of European vocabulary based on African or Asian syntax. Recent systematic studies of these languages show complex patterns of mutual influence on many levels. To explain the structural similarities of pidgin languages, some linguists, such as Keith Whinnom, have postulated a relexification theory. According to this theory, the Portuguese pidgin used along the West African Coast from the 16th to the 19th centuries became the basis for all subsequent West Indian, Caribbean, and Oriental pidgin languages. As an alternate explanation, current work in psycholinguistics suggests that these similarities do not in fact have to be traced back to a parent Portuguese pidgin but can be the result of universal language acquisition capacities. This report presents some of the similarities between language universals used by children and those used by pidgin speakers. It concludes that pidgins could in fact be created independently of each other and still have many syntactic constructions in common. (RS)

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A Psycholinguistic Approach to Pidgin Languages

Lucretia Kinney

Pidgin languages have recently been of interest to linguists for the data they provide on substratum influences and on language contact and development. Traditionally pidgins were not considered "true languages" but rather corruptions of some European language, or mixed languages, that is, made up of European vocabulary and African or Asian syntax. While at first glance this might appear to be true, systematic studies of pidgin and creole languages show complex patterns of mutual influence on all levels.

Pidgins arise most frequently in short contacts between people who have no language in common, and where a detailed exchange of information is not required. Thus a simple lingua franca is created to fill the communication needs. If, as happened among the African slaves transported to the Caribbean, the function of the pidgin is expanded so that it becomes the native language of a community, it is then termed a creole language. Historically, the use of pidgins has been fairly common. The earliest record of a pidgin dates from the Middle Ages and tells of a trade language used by European crusaders in the eastern end of the Mediterranian. With the advent of European trade with Africa and Asia a wide variety of pidgins came into use, and during the slave trade many of these were carried into the Americas. They all have in common certain characteristics, for example, invariable verb forms with tense and

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aspect indicated by particles (usually derived from adverbs of time), the use of reduplication as an emphatic device, nouns uninflected for case, number or gender, a SVO word order, and many similar vocabulary items.

In order to explain the similarities among these pidgin and creole languages, some linguists, among them Keith Whinnom, Douglas Taylor and Robert Thompson have proposed that the Portuguese pidgin used by traders along the West African coast from the 16th to the 19th century was the basis for all the subsequent West Indian, Caribbean and Oriental pidgin and creole languages. The original trade pidgin, they believe, was carried into these areas by traders and slaves and was subsequently relexified according to the nationality of the speakers in contact, while at the same time retaining its basic structure.

The first evidence in support of the theory came from Keith Whinnon's study of three Spanish-based pidgins, Caviteño, Ermitaño, and Zamboangueño, in the Philippines. (The use of the term Spanish-based means that most of the vocabulary comes from Spanish.) He was able to trace them back to the Portuguese pidgin, Ternateño, spoken in the 17th century in the Moluccas, from which the Ternateño speakers had migrated to the Philippines about the middle of that century. Although the vocabulary had shifted from Portuguese to Spanish, there were still significant Portuguese elements remaining as odd lexical items and grammatical markers which corresponded to those in other Indo-Portuguese pidgins. For example, "ele" was used for the third person pronoun, "na" was the locative preposition, "con" was the indirect object marker, and "ta", "ja" and "di" were the present, past and future particles before the verb.

Whinnom's further examination of pidgins in the Orient lead him to believe that they could not have spontaneously arisen from contact between Europeans and Orientals since they spread so rapidly and in a stable form. He therefore posited as their origin the Postuguese pidgin of the Cape Verdi Islands.

Taylor and Thompson subsequently studied Caribbean pidgins and creoles to see if there was any possibility of their being relexified forms of a prior Portuguese pidgin rather than restructured forms of various European languages and created independently of each other. The degree of structural and lexical correspondence among all the pidgins and creoles convinced them that they must have had a common origin before their implantation in the Caribbean. Some of the parallels that they found between the Caribbean creoles and the Portuguese pidgin were the use of "na" as a locative preposition in all the languages, reduplication, the verb phrase consisting of tense and aspect markers plus an uninflected verb, similarities among possessive pronouns and the use of "tin" or "tini" (have) and "sav" or "sabi" (know) in some French-based creoles where "gain" and "kone" would be expected to occur.

The only languages which did not fit into this theory were the English-based ones of the Caribbean, the Orient and Africa. If there had been any lexical evidence for a Portuguese base, it had vanished. Only the rapid spread of English-based trade languages during the 19th century and their simplicity and stability of form suggested that they might have been relexified from the Portuguese.

Thus, the argument for relexification rests basically on the following factors: (1) The rapid spread of trade languages, (2) Their structural similarities and simplicity, and (3) Lexical

similarities among pidgins and creoles deriving the main part of their vocabulary from Romance languages, but not between these and English-based pidgins.

Recent work in the area of psycholinguistics can suggest an alternate explanation for the simplicity and structural similarities found in all pidgin languages. Researchers studying the way in which children of various nationalities learn to speak have noticed similar developmental patterns and similar stages through which children pass in acquiring adult grammar and have proposed that they learn language because of highly specified, inborn structures. A child learns the elements of his first language by age three and appears to have intuitive knowledge of its deep structure. This developmental pattern in incompatible with theories which assume that language learning is purely imitative, especially since the patterns of the child's language development do not show steady advances towards adult speech. There are abrupt shifts in the child's speech preformance which imply reorganization of his linguistic structures, and there are several stages which characterize language learning regardless of the native language. The first is one word utterances which involve naming and demands. The second is two word utterances expressing universal topic-modifier (or pivot-open) relations, with the child's vocabulary classified into two categories, a pivot or modifier class consisting of few words of high occurance, and an open, or topic, class containing the remaining vocabulary items. The words are identified bacause of their distribution, since they do not necessarily correspond to adult classes and can be combined as topic and modifier or modifier and topic. Some examples are

	Topic + Modifier	Modifier + Topic
English:	Bambi go	go doggie pretty dress allgone milk
French:	taté Papa (coffee father)	ptite pépée (little doll) ici Pépéte (here Pepete)
Finnish:	vetta siina (water there) torni iso (tower big)	tuossa Rina (there Rina) enaa pipi (anymore sore)
Russian:	pup moya (navel my) papa bolshoy (papa big)	yeshche molopo (more milk)

The third stage is the emergence of hierarchical structures expressing basic grammatical relationships of subject-predicate, verb-object, and modifier and noun. It is during this stage that the child begins learning transformations instead of relying on seperate base structure rules for each sentence. Then during this final stage the child builds up transformations by successive approximations until his output resembles that of adults.

In order to account for the fact that all children pass through these stages and at first impose their own generic classification on adult grammatical categories, psycholinguists suggest that the child classifies the adult speech he hears according to the universal categories the speech exemplifies. The idea that the first stages of linguistic development are guided by universal hierarchies of categories is tied to Chomsky's hypothesis of a language acquisition device as an innate property of every person. The content of the language acquisition device may be the entire set of linguistic universals as David McNeill suggests, or it could contain a sort of process mechanism, i.e., a set of proceedures and inference rules to process linguistic data. In the former case, the device would act as a grid through which the child filters adult speech, and the fact that languages have strikingly universal

grammatical relationships and formal devices would then be because these are part of the innate structure of man. The child simply learns to choose which ones apply to the language he is learning. In the later, linguistic universals are a result of innate cognitive competence rather than the content of that competence. Whatever the actual make-up of the language learning process, the evidence does indicate that there is an innate ability for structuring in specific ways the early language data, and for forming and testing hypotheses about this structure until adult-like speech is acquired.

It is within this framework of language acquisition that data from pidgin and creole languages will be examined. The pidgin data is from Melanesian Pidgin English, Jamaican English, Louisiana France, Sranan (a Dutch-based creole), Crioulo (a Portuguese-based creole), and three closely related Spanish-based pidgins, Caviteño, Ermitaño and Zamboangueño. Data for child language comes from English, German (the German child was bilingual, English-German), French, Russian, and a few isolated examples from Luo, Samoan and Finnish.

Many of the common structural features found in pidgin languages are also common to those in child language, for when two or more speakers come in contact in a specific, restricted situation they must rapidly devise a means for elementary communication. Thus, many of the basic constructions would be those of a universal, unmarked nature possible drawn from the universal language acquisition capacity, especially since in most cases of pidginization the contact languages have differed greatly in syntax and morphology. (This situation contrasts with someone's being taught a second language where the emphasis is to learn the standard speech patterns

of the community, or the development of languages such as the Romance where their differences from Latin resulted from twenty centuries of gradual change.)

If data from a variety of pidgins are examined and compared with data from child language it can be seen that the similarities in the pidgins, generally explained by the relexification theory, do not in fact have to have their origin in a parent Portuguese pidgin but can be the result of an innate creative process. For example, all these languages are isolating. Children learning inflected languages such as Russian use nouns and adjectives in the nominative, singular form and verbs in the infinitive or imperative. French children use verbs in the present tense singular forms, "pren" (take), "trouve" (find), etc., and in English the same occurs, as in "He wash", "many man", or "Daddy car". Function words such as prepositions and definite and indefinite articles are generally omitted until inflections begin to appear. Thus, a child might say, "Hai get eye", "I put my hat my room", or "Mis sa poche" (for "mis dans sa poche", He put(it) in his pocket). When function words do appear they are few in number and serve a wide variety of uses. A good example is the use of "a" in French where it serves as the first person pronoun, an all purpose preposition and an article:

"A pon a feu"(La soupe est sur le feu: The soup is on the fire)

"A bo bébé" (Je bosse le bébé: I kiss the baby)

"Gentil a moi" (Gentil pour moi: Nice of me)

The first real propositions to be used in all languages studied are "in", "on", and "with".

Vocabulary items in pidgin languages are also invariable and uninflected. Function words such as tense and aspect particles,--

prepositions and articles are few in number and are multi-purpose. One characteristic of some of the pidgins studied was their use of the third person plural pronouns as definite articles to indicate a plural noun:

La. French: "pomme-ye" (apple-they)

Sranan: "den sani" (they-thing)

Normally, however, plurality was indicated by context.

While Melanesian pidgin has only one preposition, most pidgins have three or four with meanings such as "with", "on", "in", and "for" or "to". The prepositional idea is often incorporated into the meaning of the verb either overtly, as in Melanesian, "bringup", "goway", "pulout", or understood, as in Louisiana French, "Li vole moi" (He stole (from) me), and in Crioulo, "I puy-l riba de meesa" (He put it top of table).

Another area of similarity is in the omission of the copula in pidgin and child languages. The copula is acquired relatively late by children, and except for a locative use it nevers occurs in pidgins. Some examples from children:

English: "Mark a good boy."

German: "Buch da." (Book there)

French: "Ici Pépétte." (There Pépétte)

Luo: "En saa." (It clock)

And from Pidgins:

La. French: "Li malade." (He sick)

Sranan: "Mi ma ati priti." (My mother hat torn)

Crioulo: "I ka liibru." (It not book)

"I sta na kaasa." (He is in house)

Melanesian: "Mi pliceboy." (I police boy)

"Mi finim tasol i no stop." (I search but it is not there)

Spanish pidgins: "Tu bueno." (You good)

"Ele sta na mercado" (He is at market)

Another basic relationship constructed similarly in child and pidgin languages is that of the genitive. The most common way to express it is the simple juxtaposition of the two nouns in either order, possessor plus thing possessed, or thing possessed plus possessor, usually depending on the work order in adult speech, or on the word order of the language serving as the vocabulary base for pidgins. Another less frequent construction is the addition of a possessive particle between the two nouns, and in this case the word order is always possessed plus particle plus possessor. Some examples from children:

German: "Mama Hut" (Mama hat)

English "Daddy car" (

Russian: "Baba kuslo" (Grandma armchair)

French: "Taté papa" (Coffee Papa)

"Maman bobo" (Mama button)

The French word order can vary with the most usual being that of the first example, possessed plus possessor, as would be expected based on adult French word order, e.g., "Le café de Papa". The two French children studied, however, used these constructions infrequently, preferring to insert their general function word "a" between the nouns: "A pour a Nini" (Le poudre de Nini: The powder of Nini), "Pantalon a Papa" (trousers of Papa).

From the pidgin data there are similar examples:

La. French: "fille roi" (daughter king)

Sranan: "pastor djari" (pastor garden)

Jamaican English: "girl fada" (girl father)

Melanesian English: "house belong borota" (house of brother)

Crioulo: "kaasa de reegulu" (house of chief)

Consistent with these constructions is the tendency to have noun plus modifier where the genitive is possessed plus possessor, and to have modifier plus noun in other cases. This, however, is only a tendency; Russian children, for example, use noun plus modifier, "kubik bolshaya" (block big) or "pyero tvayo" (pen your), where the opposite construction might be expected from the genitive word order. (Adult Russian uses modifier plus noun.) Similarly, Melanesian English, Louisiana French and French children use modifier plus noun where the opposite could be predicted, although for the French child this is not necessarily inconsistant since he sometimes used possessor plus possessed for the genitive. Louisiana French retains the same word order as French. Of the English -based pidgins Melanesian is the only one using this type of genitive construction, possibly because of influence from Oriental languages, or possibly to distinguish the genitive from conjoined phrases where the use of a conjucntion is optional. Thus, "mari Joe" means "Joe and his wife" rather than "Joe's wife".

Because of the lack of inflections and few function words, one would expect a fairly strict word order to be maintained to avoid ambiguities. Children's early structures show a preference for subject-predicate and predicate-object type constructions:

Russian: "mama pura" (mama walk)

"day chasy" (give watch)

Luo: "chungu biro" (European come)

"adway cham" (I-want food)

French: "Renée pris" (Renée take)

"mange la soupe" (eat the soup)

English: "Bambi go"

"give doll"

Then regardless of the word order of the parent languages most children will combine these concepts into SVO constructions. Again Russian is the exception, for the children first used SOV but soon switched to SVO.

German: "Papa spiel Ball" (Papa play ball)

French: "Renée a pris ça" (Renée took that)

"Je cache le pas" (I catch it not)

English: "She took it"

Russian: "Mama niska tsitats" (Mama book read)

"Mama tsitats niska" (Mama read book)

The SVO order is invariable whether the object is a noun or pronoun. In standard French the normal order SVO changes to SOV when the object is a pronoun, e.g., "Je ne le cache pas", but this distinction is not made by the children.

Pidgin languages also employ an SVO order:

La. French: "Mo laime li" (I like him)

"Gros Jean te gain tab" (Big John had table)

Spanish pidgins: "Gente ya compra platanos" (People bought bananas)

"Ele ya mira vos" (He saw you)

Sranan: "Dem no sah en" (They not know her)

Crioulo: "Es rapaas daa-l dinigeeru" (This boy give her money)

Melanesian: "Mifella hotim water" (We heat water)

The use of this word order rather that VSO or SOV may derive from a desire to find the least ambiguious structure in which to combine an unmarked series of words, since both subject and object

can be of the same word class. For example, the Russian "Mama book read" could possibly mean "I'm reading Mama's book", "Mama is reading a book", or even "Mama, here's a book to read (to me)". In the pidgin languages pronouns are often undifferentiated as to case, so that their occurance in separate positions clearly indicates their meaning. Furthermore, the combination noun phrase plus noun phrase in pidgins indicates a relative clause and would have to be distinguished from a subject-object relationship.

There is one variation on this word order which is common to all of the child and pidgin languages studied. Called "topicalization" by Jeffery Gruber, it takes the form OSV(O) or SSmarkerV(O). Gruber suggests that in the case of children, it has the form topic noun phrase and subject-less comment clause which are co-generated. This would exolain why there is sometimes a pause between the topic and comment or why the two parts of the sentence may have differing intonation patterns. However, as some of the examples show, this type of construction remains in use even after subject-predicate relationships are acquired. For older children and for pidgin language speakers it seems to come from the co-generation of a noun phrase plus a following sentence, and is used for emphasis, or in the case of Melanesian English as an integral part of the language's structure.

Noun phrase object as topic in child language:

English: "Those others, put them?"

"All the letters of the ABC I don't know"

German: "Dadi, Mama häng dadi" (Stockings, Mama hang stockings)

Russian: "Spat khachu" (Sleep I want)

Noun phrase subject as topic:

English: "Car, it broken"

French: "Papa, il fait" (Papa he does)

"Ou il est, l'autre de maman?" (Where it is, the other one of Mama?)

Noun phrase as topic in pidgins:

Sranan: "Dem-srefi a no lobi dam" (Them, he not like them)

"Ju-srefi a kisi" (You he catch)

La. French: "Madeleine li vole moi" (Madeleine he steal (from) me)

Noun phrase subject as topic:

Crioulo: "El, i noobu" (He, he young)

"Es rapaas, i noobu" (This boy, he young)

La. French: "Mo fait tout ça tit maitre li fait" (I do all young Master he do)

In Melanesian English a form of topicalization is obligatory in the third person subject-predicate constructions where there must be an expressed subject plus a subject marker, "i" for both singular and plural, before the verb. For example, "Disfella diwai i allsame man" (This tree it like man), or "Em i stil tu" (They, they steal too, or, He, he steal too).

Gruber notices that in children's speech marked pronouns, "me, her, them, him" have the same distribution as nouns, while unmarked ones, "I, he, she, they", occur only before verbs. Thus, only marked pronouns occur as topics: "Him, bear", "Them, they eat", "Girl she go way". Both Crioulo and Melanesian English employ this concept for the third person. "I" in both languages occurs only as a subject marker while "el" and "em" are used as subjects or objects in the same way as nouns.

Turning to some types of transformations, the same processes for altering base structure are used in both pidgin and child languages. The types used by pidgin speakers and the first ones used by children involve maintaining the normal word order while changing

intonation (for imperatives and yes/no questions) or adding a marker at the beginning or end of a sentence (for wh-questions and negatives). Children will first say things like "net dam" (No I will give), "vody net" (water no), "A trouve pas" (I find no), "Où il est?" (Where he is?), "Nein Mama Dadi" (No Mama stocking), "This is powder?" and "You feed me!". The next operations the children must learn are deletion of the subject in imperatives, the development of the verb phrase for negatives and questions and finally the correct permutations on the base structure to yield adult-like sentences. Permutations are a late development in child language. The base structure is altered as little as possible and markers are kept contiguous to the elements they modify. Thus, for English speaking children the negative marker is kept next to the verb, the copula and auxiliaries are used redundently in questions, and tense is kept with the main verb: "I not touch", "Is this is the powder?", "Where does the wheel goes?", and "How can he can look?".

In pidgin languages, also, permutations seldom occur and the base structure is altered as little as possible. Questions are formed by intonation or the addition of a question marker to the sentence. Imperatives are formed by intonation or deletion of the subject. The negative marker is added before the verb phrase, and the concept of negation is generalized over the whole sentence, yeilding multiple negatives". Children do this , too, before learning to negate only one concept, unless the adult language uses a series of negatives, and will say things like "I can't do nothing with no string". Examples from pidgins:

La. French: "Mo p'ole" (from mo pas ole: I not want)

"Qui-ça to fait?" (What you do?)

Spanish pidgins: "Cuando Pelisa de casa con Pedro?" (When Pelisa will marry Pedro?)

"Visos no ya pode" (We not were able)

Crioulo: "Bos bin?" (You (pl.) come!)

"I ka sibi naada" (He not know nothing)

Sranan: "I no m kom sjwen dape" (You not must come swim here)

"Da-j g-a top sodro?" (Then you go to top stair? Did you go upstairs?)

Melanesian: "You stretim tak long mi!" (You straight talk to me! Tell me the truth)

"Wafor borota i no come yet" (Why brother he not come yet?)

Embeddings, like permutations, occur late in child language and infrequently in pidgins. Sentences and sentence elements are simply strung together with their underlying structure kept relatively intact. Children say, "I see a house and another and another", "I see a comb and I see a brush", "Il faut moi je l'ecrive" (for "Il faut que je l'ecrive": I must write it). Relative clauses are first made by conjoining two sentences, "I know what is that", "I met a man was sick", before distnrbing the noun phrase, verb phrase relationships underlying them. Similarly in pidgins, clauses are formed by two sentences added together.

La. French: "Commen to connain tous bouge-ye to papa?"

(How you know all (these) people (are) your father?)

"Pou peche fieve bois tisonne to fait vec mais..."

(To cure fever boil tea you make with corn...)

Sranan: "Mi si a ooru froo-dati ben sdon a oso"

(I see the old woman sat by house)

Melanesian: "All meri cry long disfella man i die"

(All women cry for this man he die)

"Fightim kokonus i fall down"

(Strike coconut it fall down)

Crioulo: "I kuuri i bay banyaaθl"

(He run he go catch it)

This paper has presented some of the similarities between the language universals used by children and those used by pidgin and creole speakers. These languages are isolating, the normal word order is SVO, the genitive construction and the placement of modifiers and nouns follow the same principles and all use simple transformations of addition and deletion to modify the base structure. These correspondences are significant enough to indicate that speakers could be relying on a universal language acquisition capacity when faced with the necessity of basic communication. The use of this would not negate the relexification theory but would confine it to languages that could definitely be traced back to a parent Portuguese pidgin, such as Papiamento, a Caribbean creole, or the three Spanish-based pidgins, Caviteno, Ermitano, and Zamboangueno, rather than applying it to all pidgins because of their structural similarities. Pidgins could in fact be created independently of each other and would still have many syntactic constructions in common. Thus, English-based pidgins and creoles would correspond structurally but not lexically to pidgins based on Romance languages, and would not have to be assumed to be genetically related.

Obviously the language acquisition capacity is not the only factor involved in the development of pidgin languages. Speakers in contact will also draw on the stock of linguistic structures already present in their own languages. However, it is hoped that a study such as outlined here can help lead to a greater understanding of pidginisation and the creative process in language.

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